DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 414 810 HE 030 703

AUTHOR	Iannozzi, Maria
TITLE	Policy Perspectives. Exemplars. Portland State University.
INSTITUTION	Pew Higher Education Roundtable, Philadelphia, PA; Knight Collaborative, Akron, OH.; Pennsylvania Univ., Philadelphia. Inst. for Research on Higher Education.
SPONS AGENCY	Pew Charitable Trusts, Philadelphia, PA.; John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Miami, FL.
PUB DATE	1997-08-00
NOTE	9p.; For related documents, see HE 030 702 and HE 030 704. Published in conjunction with "Policy Perspectives."
AVAILABLE FROM	Institute for Research on Higher Education, 4200 Pine St., 5A, Philadelphia, PA 19104-4090; phone: 1-800-437-9799.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Administrative Change; *College Curriculum; College Faculty; College Instruction; College Students; Curriculum Design; Curriculum Development; Educational Attitudes; Educational Change; Excellence in Education; *Experiential Learning; Higher Education; *Interdisciplinary Approach; Program Descriptions; School Community Programs; *Service Learning; *State Universities; Student Participation
IDENTIFIERS	Capstone Programs; *Portland State University OR

ABSTRACT

This report describes efforts by Portland State University (Oregon) (PSU) to undertake administrative restructuring, reinvent the curriculum with an interdisciplinary focus, and initiate experiential learning programs that benefit both students and the community. By reducing support staff and middle management, PSU freed up funds to create a cohesive, three-tiered University Studies program that features year-long Freshman and Sophomore Inquiry courses built around interdisciplinary themes; upper-division Cluster Courses in the junior and senior years; and a Senior Capstone Experience, an integrated service-learning experience that involves every student in an academically based community project. To implement the curriculum, faculty collaborate across departments and in groups to propose interdisciplinary courses and Capstone projects. Comments from a student and an administrator on the effectiveness of PSU's new curriculum are included. (MDM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 414 810

PERSPECTIVES
August 1997

Exemplars

Portland State University

The Problem: *In the face of declining state revenues and a misaligned state funding formula, transform a fragmented curriculum into one that meets the mission of an urban university.*

The Solution: *Undertake administrative restructuring, reinvent the curriculum with an interdisciplinary focus, and initiate experiential learning programs that benefit both students and the community.*

To realize its newly defined mission—as an "urban" university serving the needs of the community as well as educating undergraduate students—Portland State University faced a series of academic and financial hurdles. With declining retention and completion rates, PSU had to ask itself: "Do our undergraduate programs address the needs of a largely adult and part-time student body that struggles to stay in school?" With state funding formulas that shortchanged an institution with so many non-traditional learners, it also had to ask: "How do we fund the type of curricular reform we want to achieve?" PSU's ultimate answer was to take a fragmented curriculum that undermined student and faculty productivity and turn it into a streamlined general education that features experiential learning through community service.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN OTHER THAN PAPER COPY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Univ of PA

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

- ☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
- ☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

But to accomplish this end, it first had to contend with the financial dilemmas that have become all too common for the nation's public institutions—and PSU has learned well the discipline of fiscal exigency. The state's FTE-based funding formula simply does not recognize the needs of an urban university; PSU's part-time students take fewer credit hours per semester, and that translates into fewer public dollars of support for the entire institution. Severe rollbacks in state aid, coupled with a state property tax abatement, further limited revenues from public sources, causing PSU to undertake significant internal budget reallocations to support the type of change the newly defined mission required. Reducing administrative support staff by 13 percent and middle-management by one-third, it was able to generate substantial savings of more than $3.5 million, increase academic and administrative productivity, and reduce paper transactions through the use of technology.

Dollars and time freed-up from restructuring allowed the University to focus its resources on curriculum redesign. Rather than frame its questions around why retention was low, PSU chose instead to ask how it could reinvent the undergraduate experience, sending faculty on visits to other campuses to see what was working elsewhere. Eventually, through the efforts of PSU's General Education Working Group, the faculty transformed the usual smorgasbord of unrelated distributional courses into a cohesive, three-tiered curriculum, called the University Studies program, that reduces barriers among disciplines and promotes active student learning and teamwork. "We were thinking purposefully about how students form linkages: with each other, with the University, among knowledge bases, and with the larger community," says Charles White, director of the new University Studies Program.

In addition to undertaking coursework in the major, students in University Studies enroll in a required number of Freshman Inquiry

courses in the first year, Sophomore Inquiry in the second, and Upper Division Cluster Courses in the junior and senior years. An experience-based project at the end of students' careers—the Senior Capstone Experience—takes students and the knowledge they have learned beyond PSU's walls through integrated service learning projects.

Students begin their careers with Freshman Inquiry, interdisciplinary courses that were developed by teams of faculty from different disciplines and provide a "transition in" to postsecondary work. Students choose one of five year-long thematic courses to pursue. For example, one thematic option, "Values in Conflict: Knowledge, Power, and Politics" uses the knowledge of faculty from five disciplines to explore the conflicts that emerge when perspectives collide in a society. Aaron Pederson, a junior, explains the benefits of this innovative course structure. "For the entire year, you are focused on one theme, exploring it through the lenses of different disciplines. It demonstrates how disciplines are connected, rather than being separate entities."

Aaron also describes how the Inquiry courses foster student learning. "The biggest benefit of University Studies is its consistency. You're in smaller classes with the same students and the same professors for an entire year. It makes the transition into college more comfortable. You get to know professors on a personal level, and they get to know you. It also passes the responsibility for education back to the student. You don't just soak up information, you pursue it, make connections across disciplines, and apply the information in projects." By stressing engagement in group projects, PSU students learn how to work together, pool knowledge, and use that collaboration as a learning tool. Aaron adds, "It promotes relationships in which students almost become 'teachers' for other students. In a University without typical dorm living arrangements, we are able to form learning communities around our Freshman Inquiry classes."

In fulfilling its mission as an urban university, the Senior Capstone represents PSU's focus on integrated service learning, involving every student in an academically based community project. In effect, the Capstone provides students with a "transition out" by offering practical experience and providing a summative application of the knowledge and skills students have acquired. Through these experiential learning projects, students give back to the community what they have learned—a win-win situation for both PSU's students and its neighbors. For example, students have begun an effort to renaturalize an area of the Columbia River and its banks, have embarked on an oral history project that documents the stories of a local community, and have initiated a recycling project in local middle schools. The plan, according to Professor White, is to incorporate experiential learning into all Freshman Inquiry courses as well, bookending students' entire scholastic experience with applied community service.

PSU's new approach to teaching and learning—and by extension the role of its faculty—is as fresh as the structure of the new curriculum. "There are multiple places and ways for faculty to participate," says Professor White. "In addition to being instructors in the Freshman and Sophomore Inquiry courses, faculty collaborate across departments and in groups to propose interdisciplinary courses and Capstone projects." The small classes, portfolio-based assessments, interdisciplinary focus, and community projects all challenge traditional faculty roles. In keeping with its new mission, PSU has completely changed promotion and tenure guidelines for faculty. Without diminishing the value of traditional research, the new guidelines value most highly scholarship that emphasizes the curriculum and the concept of community-based learning.

Although University Studies is well established on campus, PSU still faces the challenge of overcoming the reluctance of several

departments to participate in the new curriculum. The University's Center for Academic Excellence provides support for departments to work in teams to develop interdisciplinary curricula, but several departments still hedge, fearing a loss of internal revenue enjoyed through the distributional model, which is still in effect but being phased out. In response, PSU has continued to develop a menu of incentives to entice departments to come aboard. One successful strategy was to equate participation in University Studies with funding for teaching positions. Savings garnered from administrative restructuring were reallocated to the Teaching Fellows program, which provides departments with the funds to create a Ph.D. position for developing new curricula and teaching within University Studies.

Perhaps the best incentives will come from the demonstrated results of the curriculum's implementation. The equation is simple: enrollment is dropping in departments not involved in University Studies and increasing in those that are. University Studies also seems to be leading students in new disciplinary directions when it comes time to choose a major, providing further incentive for "unpopular" departments with limited enrollment to get involved. "Surprisingly, the number of physics majors at PSU has increased significantly, and we know it is due to the engaging and applied presentation of physics concepts in a Freshman Inquiry course," explains Professor White. For the institution as a whole, freshman applications are up 40 percent—ironically, mostly for traditional students, but it is a trend that will ultimately help funnel more state funding into PSU. Finally, choosing to reinvent the undergraduate experience rather than framing reform solely around the issue of student retention proved to be the right approach: retention rates are growing, and they are expected to climb even further as the new curriculum affects a larger portion of PSU's student body.

Institutional Statistics:

State-owned, doctoral-degree granting institution in Portland, Oregon

14,348 students

501 full-time faculty, **171** part-time faculty

Milestones on the Path to Reform:

- At the end of the 1980s, state funding rollbacks forced PSU to consider how to carry on its activities with fewer resources.

- A new president was appointed in 1990, and through the course of the next year a strategic planning process was initiated with the creation of a vision for the University, the redefinition of PSU's mission as an urban university, and the delineation of goals for the first phase of reform.

- In April of 1991, PSU engaged Introspect, a consulting firm, to examine its options for administrative and operational reorganization.

- PSU established Working Groups on General Education and Interdisciplinary Programs to guide curriculum reforms in the fall of 1992.

- In 1992, PSU was evaluated by the Oregon Legislature's Board Administrative Review Committee (BARC), which had mandated a review of the Oregon State System of Higher Education in 1991. PSU was lauded for its reform efforts and touted as a national model for urban education.

- In April of 1993, PSU engaged in a Pew Campus Roundtable, which "inspired and informed a review of the undergraduate curriculum."

- A 1993 report by the PSU Committee on Undergraduate Student Retention indicated some gains in retention rates, but concluded there was room for further improvement.

- PSU held an "All-Campus" Symposium on Curricular Reform in September of 1993 to review the new curriculum developed by the General Education Working Group.

- In October of 1993, the General Education Working Group revised and completed the new University Studies curriculum, which was approved by the Faculty Senate in November.

- In April of 1994, PSU released its Plan for Educational Reform and Increased Productivity; in addition, the design of an infrastructure to support curricular transformation was completed.

- Students entering in the fall of 1994 were the first to enroll in the new curriculum; a review of undergraduate programs at PSU was also initiated.

- The Center for Academic Excellence, an administrative support unit for enhancing teaching and curriculum development, University-community partnerships, and assessment processes, was established in the Office of Academic Affairs in the winter of 1994.

- In the fall of 1995, the Assessment Team was formed, functioning as part of the Center for Academic Excellence.

- PSU was awarded a $176,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities in November of 1995 to develop new courses aimed at making the connection between science and the humanities more meaningful to students.

- In April of 1995, the Pappas Consulting Group of KPMG Peat Marwick prepared recommendations on how to improve student services throughout the University, with a primary focus on assisting students in the attainment of their academic goals.

Exemplars
Exemplars

Exemplars **is supported by The Pew Charitable Trusts and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and is a publication of the Pew Higher Education Roundtable and the Knight Collaborative.**

Robert Zemsky
Senior Editor

James F. Gaibally, Jr.
Contributing Editor

Ann J. Duffield
Director of Communications

Joan S. Girgus
Contributing Editor

Gregory R. Wegner
Managing Editor

William F. Massy
Contributing Editor

Portland State University is one of three recipients of the 1996 Pew Leadership Award for the Renewal of Undergraduate Education.

The institutional profile for this *Exemplars* was researched and written by Maria Iannozzi.

Inquiries should be directed to *Exemplars*, Institute for Research on Higher Education, 4200 Pine Street, 5A, Philadelphia, PA 19104-4090, or call the Education Line, 1-800-437-9799.
E-mail inquiries should be directed to *pp-requests@irhe.upenn.edu*
Visit our Web site at *www.irhe.upenn.edu/pp/pp-main.html*

©1997 by the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania. All rights reserved.